

Wilson Memorial

A First Short Story

by RUTH GORDON



Drawings by Dorothy McKay

MR. CLEMENT jogged forward in his porch chair and studied intently the star-strewn sky. "A beautiful night," he declared thoughtfully. "See Orion's sword and belt?"

"Where's that, Victor?" and Mrs. Clement, too, leaned forward.

"Over Blaikie's house," he said vaguely, and then after a moment, "those four stars straight across and down the middle, hanging down like."

"Oh yes, I see what you mean. Pretty," she commented and returned once more to her placid rocking.

"A beautiful night," he repeated and, taking off his shoe, extracted a pebble which had been pressing into his heel for some time.

"What's that, Victor?"

"Pebble," he said briefly, and after examining it thoroughly, as if his shoe had been an oyster and this a possible pearl, cast it over the railing into the nasturtium bed.

Up the street came the sound of whistling, which became louder. The musical young man stopped at the foot of their walk, struck a match, and looked at a slip of paper. "Mr. Victor Clement live here?" he asked.

Mr. Clement rose. "Mr. Clement? Er — yes," he said after a moment of deliberation, as if after running over a list of people he had finally recalled one of that name. "I er," he began confidently, and then paused hesitantly, finally deciding with a slight cough to say "am him" rather than "am he."

"I'm John Sibley," the young man said, offering his hand. "I'd like to talk to you, Mr.

Clement, about a meeting we're getting up for a Woodrow Wilson Memorial. I don't know whether you've heard about it or not."

"A Wilson Memorial!" exclaimed Mr. Clement. "Here, take this seat, young feller. Mama, get Mr. . . . er . . . a chair."

"Can't I get it?" offered the visitor.

"Oh no," said Mr. Clement graciously, "it's just inside."

"Want to come out, Willie?" Mrs. Clement called, holding open the screen door.

"You're letting in flies," her husband warned. "He don't want to come out."

"Should think he would, with all that fur on him," she said and sat down beside Mr. Clement. "There he is now," she exclaimed in mild exasperation, as Willie tried his claws on the screen. "I declare, that cat!"

"Let him out, Mama," Mr. Clement advised wearily. "Now then, young man — I didn't get your name —"

"Sibley — John Sibley. You were down on our list, sir, as one of the Democrats of this ward, and we're getting together all the loyal supporters we can for this meeting next Tuesday to see what we can work out for a memorial to Woodrow Wilson. They haven't decided yet what it will be, but most likely some sort of a fountain. We thought you might like to come."

"Why, my Godfrey!" burst out Mr. Clement.

"Papa, *papa*," reproved his wife, with a slight Southern accent of refinement.

"Why, damn it," he continued, "what did I always say? There wasn't a time since

Woodrow Wilson took office as President of the United States that I haven't said — and you can ask her," shaking a finger at his wife, "— there wasn't a time when I haven't said it's all right to talk this and say that — . Why, there never *was* a man in a more trying position with the eyes of the whole world looking at him, but I said there'd be a time when he'd go down in history alongside of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, and people just laughed. Well, they got another laugh coming, thought I, and the day he died, Wilson, I called up Mama, Mrs. Clement here, from the factory and told her to set out the flag at half-mast. Never did that before except when Cleveland died. Another great man. You remember, Mama?"

"Whatever became of Mrs. Cleveland?" asked Mrs. Clement affably.

"Woodrow Wilson. . . ." said Mr. Clement from the depths of his soul.

"Well sir, if everyone was like that, there wouldn't be much doubt about a memorial."

"Mr. Sibley, I've lived in this town going on twenty-nine years. She," pointing at Mrs. Clement, "was married at her sister's up to Hingham and then we moved here. That is, we lived up at 41 Warren Street first and then — but that ain't interesting *you* none. What I set out to say was, I've lived here going on twenty-nine years and it don't seem possible to me there's enough people here got sense to get up an undertaking like this, but if there is, and the town ain't got the get-up to support it, well," he finished a little breathlessly, "it ought to be shot. That's all I got to say."

"Mr. Clement's quite a talker when he gets excited," Mrs. Clement put in. "I always tell him he ought to have been a lawyer."

"No, no, I never had a chance at no education, but there's a man that *did*. I guess when you come right down to it, Woodrow Wilson was just about as educated a President as you could find. Washington, Lincoln, even Grover Cleveland, take any of them, they couldn't hold a candle to what that man knew in his little finger. College president, Governor of New Jersey — I tell you, Mr. Sibley, when he sat down in the Presidential seat we could *all* sit back, knowing we had a man was well equipped."

"Yes, he must of been a very nice man from all accounts," Mrs. Clement interrupted again.

"My cousin Carrie lives down in Washington, so we got to know about him more than most people, I guess. She saw him once. It seems he went several times to see the vaudeville theater there and she happened to go the same night. Carrie felt at one time — of course this is just something she heard; she didn't know herself, she said — he was supposed to be interested in an actress. Did you ever hear anything like that, Mr. Sibley?"

"No, of course he didn't," roared Mr. Clement, "nor nobody else, except that fat-headed cousin of yours."

"Why, Victor, Carrie means all right. I guess in a place like Washington there's always a certain amount of talk, don't you think, Mr. Sibley?"

"That's it, Mrs. Clement. Any man in a big position. . . ."

"Don't even have to be in a big position, so long as you know her cousin Carrie," put in Mr. Clement savagely.

Their guest laughed politely. "Well anyway, we can count on you Tuesday," he said, getting up. "Eight o'clock at Brazee Hall. Perhaps you'll find you may have to do a little special work, so long as we know you're so interested."

"Proud and happy to do it. Call on me to the limit, sir," declared Mr. Clement, "to the limit."

II

AT THE TOP of the steps where his guest had left him, Mr. Clement stood on, lost in thought. 1914. Why, there never *was* a man who found himself in as difficult a position as Wilson. All through the war, for that matter, and then after the armistice it was worst of all. Everyone worrying him and interfering.

He looked up at the stars set in the soft black of the summer sky. Wilson was too great a man for them. People couldn't understand such lofty ideals. They hadn't a notion of what a man like him, with all that education, was driving at.

Mrs. Clement jogged comfortably back and forth in the rocker. "Wonder who he is — Mr. Sibley. *Nice* young man," she ruminated. "Wish I'd offered him a glass of root beer. There's some good and cold on the ice."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"I never thought. Wonder where that Willie

could have gone to? I want to lock up and go to bed." She got up and pushed her chair back against the wall. There was a startled squawk and Willie flew from his cozy corner beneath the rocker, down the steps to the board walk where he took up a dignified and somewhat temporary position, looking back nervously from time to time.

"Let him stay there," advised Mr. Clement. "Do him good. I got to get to bed."

"No, I'd feel better if he was in. Willie, Willie," she called, "here Willie. He don't like it out."

"Well, if he don't, he don't seem to know about it," said Mr. Clement, as Willie started off on a leisurely stroll. "Come on, I'll lock up."

Inside, Mrs. Clement took the alarm clock and, yawning, started upstairs. "Don't forget the lights, Victor."

"All right. What did I do with that Wilson badge I had?"

"Wilson badge?"

"The one I got when he died. That mourning badge."

"Oh Lordy," groaned Mrs. Clement, "you going to get that out *now*? Why, Victor, I don't know's I know where it is. Look in the table drawer in the parlor."

"What table drawer?" he asked helplessly.

"The table drawer," Mrs. Clement repeated, "down under those photographs. Or else look in the stein on the sideboard. Sometimes I put keys in there and maybe that's where I put that. The clock key's in there I know."

Mr. Clement looked vaguely toward the dining room.

"Wait a minute, Victor. Where *did* I see that badge? Just the other day I was dusting and I came across it." She hurried out to the kitchen, returning a moment later, blowing on the little celluloid badge and polishing it on her apron.

"Where was it?"

"Right on the pincushion in the pantry. I knew I didn't throw it away."

"Throw it away? What would you want to do that for?"

He waited until she was upstairs, then,

walking to the sideboard, looked into its oak-framed mirror and pinned the badge to his right lapel. Drawing back, he studied the effect with a critical eye. Something disturbed him. "Here, wait a minute," he said aloud and, taking out an old pair of grape scissors, hacked off two little black streamers which hung below the badge. "Nothing dead about *him*! His memory's green as the day he died," he murmured, adjusting the badge more to one side. "Greener," he added. "Wilson Memorial. A great day for the community the day that's erected. Yes sir, a great day for us all." Then slowly and deliberately he opened the cupboard in the sideboard and, reaching past the home-made elder wine, drew forth a nearly empty bottle, impressively labeled "Amontillado."

Mr. Clement looked at it respectfully, then pulling out the cork, lifted the bottle high to the reflection in the mirror. "To T. Woodrow Wilson. To his memorial that now sits among the great," he said solemnly, and drank deep.



"Nothing dead about him!"

MR. CLEMENT was helping his wife dry the dishes. "To-day's been a scorcher," he declared, polishing a teacup. "At noon the corner of Milk Street and Washington was ninety-eight in the shade. Paper claimed hottest May

twenty-eighth in fourteen years. There was two people dropped dead of sunburn and they expected more before night."

"Dead of sunburn?" exclaimed Mrs. Clement, at once interested. "Why I never heard of that."

"Sunburn! I guess you never did. Sunstroke was what I said."

"No, Victor, I guess that's what you meant to say but you said sunburn. I thought it sounded awful funny," and she laughed.

Mr. Clement regarded her, frankly disgusted. "Interesting sense of humor you got, I must say. Supposing I said they died of freckles. It ain't nothing to stand around laughing at."

The doorbell rang and Mrs. Clement wiped her hands and, giving her corset a quick jerk

at the back and another in front (which left it just where it was before), went to answer it. Mr. Clement hung his dish towel over the rack and picked up the *Evening Globe*.

"Victor," his wife called, and then, "Just step inside. It's cooler in here than out on the porch. Oh Victor!"

"This gentleman wants to see you about something," she said as he came into the hall, his sleeves rolled up, paper still in hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Clement. My name's Godfrey. Don't think I've had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"Will you sit down, Mr. Godfrey? Mama, just hand me my coat."

"Don't make company of me, Mr. Clement. If I was home, I'd be just the same as you are. In fact, when I leave here I'm going right back to water my front lawn, if the mosquitoes ain't too bad. You notice them much down here?"

"Well, no more'n usual," Mr. Clement replied, not caring how soon Mr. Godfrey got at his front lawn and let him return to his paper.

However, his guest seemed in no hurry and settled himself comfortably in a rocker. "I been trying to get round here, Mr. Clement, for the last couple days, only this hot weather made me go kind of slow. But to make a long story short, what I've come about is something maybe you've heard of. The *Ledger* had a piece about it last week. It's about a memorial we're getting up for Woodrow Wilson and we'd appreciate whatever you could do for us in the way of a little donation."

"Oh, yes indeed, Mr. Godfrey. I been saying to myself I knew your face. Why, you was chairman up at the meeting. Yes indeed, I was there and proud of the town that they had it. But I tell you what, Mr. Godfrey, I'm one of the collectors myself, if you remember, so I guess by rights I kind of ought to add my widow's mite, so to speak, to my own collection."

Mr. Godfrey looked surprised. "Is that so? What section you canvassing, Mr. Clement?"

"Why, I ain't been notified yet. As a matter of fact, I been expecting a letter any day now."

"That's mighty funny. All the letters are supposed to have been sent out," said Mr. Godfrey, puzzled. "I was with the committee when we made up the lists and I don't just recall your name being down."

"Why sure, *sure*. They called for volunteers at the meeting and I went up and gave my name. The young lady taking notes on the platform who wrote it down said I was to be notified soon as the districts was allotted. I asked her particular." Mr. Clement leaned forward and looked worriedly at his guest.

"Well now, I don't know just what to say. I *do* know they've been canvassing for about a week and time's up Monday. They had a list of the fellers in the *Ledger*. Was your name down on that?"

"Why, er, my wife and I, we don't take the *Ledger*," said Mr. Clement and walked over to the window. Something seemed to absorb him, for he remained there, his back to his guest, and, taking out a large handkerchief, blew his nose loudly. "Kind of a summer cold I got," he explained.

Mr. Godfrey had never been more uncomfortable. "Yes, I get one myself ev'ry now and again. Treacherous weather we been having last day or so."

There was an awkward pause and then Mr. Clement turned back into the room. "Guess maybe I'd ought to give you my donation, Mr. Godfrey, instead of waiting any further. 'Tain't what you'd call important really, one way or the other," he said with a deprecating little laugh. "Just had a notion I'd like to help, that's all. I'm by way of being a great admirer of Woodrow Wilson."

"No, no, Mr. Clement, wouldn't think of taking it," the guest interrupted. "Must be some mistake. That fool secretary probably thought you was just offering your name as a volunteer. She didn't realize you definitely wanted to be a collector. No sense at all, that girl — probably's a Republican. But anyway, we got to do something about this right here and now."

"Why no, 'tain't nothing at all. I guess I just didn't appreciate they was only volunteers you was calling for."

"Well, sure, but anyone specially interested like you, we're glad to put to work. Now I tell you what, there was some parts of town we didn't plan to canvass, thought maybe there wouldn't be five hundred dollars in them. That's what we're asking each collector to bring in. But from the reports I get, some of them don't look like they're going to squeeze out that much and I was just wondering if

maybe you'd undertake to cover the places we overlooked. It's going to appear bad if we don't get that five thousand we set out for. Time's up Monday, you know, so there's only three days left, but it'd help out an awful lot if you'd say yes."

"Why, I'd be real glad to," said Mr. Clement, his voice a little shaky.

"We can't afford to fall down on this thing, Mr. Clement, and give the Republicans a laugh. This memorial's got to go through and go through big. That means you got to do your share and I got to do mine."

"All right," he said more firmly. "To tell the truth, I'd feel mighty bad to have a Wilson Memorial erected here without my doing nothing towards it."

"Sure you would. Now look, here's a pretty complete map of the town with a list of all the streets. Those crossed off are already covered but there's some left, that new section near the Sailor's Home. We figured those people'd just moved in and'd be busy paying up installments on their houses, but probably some of them might be glad to help. Then there's some streets down by the track and these few others. You take this list and cover as much as possible before Monday. Whatever you bring in'll be mighty acceptable."

"I'll start to-night," said Mr. Clement.

Mr. Godfrey mopped his brow and got up to go.

"You'll get my contribution Monday," declared Mr. Clement.

Mr. Godfrey walked down the path fanning himself with his straw hat. "Must be one of the real Wilson nuts," he murmured. "For a minute there, I was scared he was actually going to cry."

IV

MRS. CLEMENT rushed in from the dining room. "Victor, I heard every single word! Isn't it grand? I knew there was some mistake, you not hearing from them. Lovely

man, Mr. Godfrey. You think you'll start out right now?"

"Yes," he said calmly and put on his hat.

"Why, Victor," she cried, "you forgot your coat. It don't look dignified that way." And, helping him on with it, she accompanied him to the front porch.

The evening was warm and humid and several times Mr. Clement had to remove his hat and the beads of sweat which gathered on his forehead, but nevertheless he plowed on over the tracks and down the rickety, cinder-en-crusted stairway into Woodbine Avenue, his first arena.

Even Mr. Clement, led on by the high burning flame of a disciple, could not have called Woodbine Avenue a green pasture. The

cramped little houses were dark and cindery, like the railway stairs, and to even the most optimistic it would have been hard to imagine them adding so much as a single drinking cup to the Wilson Memorial Fountain. Mr. Clement forged ahead, however, his mourning badge lending him an official feeling.

The houses crowded right to the foot of the railway steps as if to help their occupants be on time for the early trains, and the house which seemed to help most, as the stairway ran straight

down to its front gate, was number 67, a small, bedraggled cottage. Mr. Clement rang its doorbell, an old-fashioned one requiring a sharp twist. It gave a forlorn peal as he stepped back on the gently sagging porch where he waited until a polite period had elapsed, when he gave another and more muscular turn to the bell, which this time let out a surprisingly loud peal and dropped off its key in his hand. He stood nervously, holding the rusty part and wondering what to do, but fortunately the house remained silent, so gratefully he put the bell-key down on the red W of the "Welcome" on the doormat, where he felt it showed to the best advantage, and walked softly down the uneven steps.

The house next door was an exact replica



*"No sense at all, that girl —
probably's a Republican."*

of number 67, and although they were divided by nothing more than a weedy path, it, oddly enough, was numbered 53. He rang the bell carefully and almost instantly a sturdy little girl of about five stood in the doorway.

"Hello," said Mr. Clement a little surprised, feeling that opening doors was the work of an older generation. "Is your papa home?"

"Papa's dead," said the little girl cheerfully and stared up interestedly at Mr. Clement to see what he would suggest next.

"Well — er, mama?" he inquired nervously, hoping the whole family had not been wiped out.

"Mama!" the little girl shouted in a voice loud enough to summon not only her mother but her late father as well. A faded-looking little woman came out, followed by another child.

Mr. Clement, seeing her, did not have the heart to ask for anything from this obviously burdened household. "Sorry to bother you, ma'am. I just wanted to know if this was Woodbine Avenue."

"Yes, it is. Couldn't you have told the gentleman that, Edie?"

"He never asked me," said Edie truthfully and looked at Mr. Clement with disappointment.

"It's Woodbine till it gets to Beal and then it's Fayette."

"Well thank you, Ma'am, I was just looking for a party along here," and down the steps he went, accompanied by a loud good-by from Edie.

In the end Woodbine Avenue proved to have almost warranted its inauspicious beginning. He went perseveringly up and down both sides and collected not quite four dollars, but he reassured himself that the other streets would prove more generous.

THE EVENING, however, was not a success. By means of a jitney and an unusual amount of walking, he had covered his whole territory and was returning with just eighteen dollars and a brand new quarter. He had found the quarter and added it gladly to swell the collection.

Mrs. Clement, with Willie on her lap, was rocking on the porch. "How'd you come out, Victor? Isn't it hot? Here, sit down."



"Hello. Is your papa home?"

"Bad," he said, "bad."

"Why, what was the trouble?"

"Didn't get but eighteen dollars. They're asking everyone to try for five hundred."

"Oh, well that's nothing. To-morrow you'll do better."

"I been everywhere," said Mr. Clement, and his voice sounded tired.

"Oh, Victor you mean you been to all your whole district?" she exclaimed, leaning forward with such a start that Willie was dumped straight off her lap.

"Every single place," he said. "People either weren't home or they was Republicans. Some streets was just vacant lots and Putnam Avenue had four houses with measles signs. I don't like this town." He leaned forward in his chair as if half decided to move out of it then and there.

"Why, it ain't Bedford that's wrong, it's just you had such bad districts. Eighteen dollars! That'll look terrible in the paper."

"What the devil you suppose I care *what* it says in the paper? But there won't be no memorial unless there's money to pay for it. You can't get up a fountain with collectors bringing in eighteen dollars."

"How much are fountains?"

Mr. Clement did not bother to answer.

"I said I wonder —"

"I don't know," he replied wearily, "but you couldn't even get a pump for that price."

He sat dejectedly in the dark. The other fellows could make it up out of their own pockets. He couldn't even do that.

"I been working since I was fourteen and what have I got to show for it? Nothing. Why,

we can't even afford to get sick. In my whole life I've never blown in twenty dollars at once and I'm going on sixty-nine. I'd like to, just to give me a feeling of respect. I'd give a whole lot for this memorial idea, but what I've got to give is just plain exactly nothing. Twenty-nine years, that's how long I been at Dean and Poor's — and if I was to drop down dead to-morrow I wouldn't even have five hundred dollars to show for it. That's a nice record for a man to hang up."

"You saved a good deal more than that really," she said gently, "only you put it all into insurance."

"That's a hell of a comfort at my age, when I want to blow in an extra dollar or so."

Mrs. Clement peered through the dark at her husband. It seemed as if the accumulation of years had at last caught up with his prickly spirit and rolled it flat. "Victor," she said, "that insurance you got for me, we been paying that premium twenty-eight years. Well, borrow on it and get your five hundred dollars. What do you need insurance on me for? It's your money went into it and you deserve something out of it. Well, why not take it now, when you got something you want it for? 'Tain't likely Bedford'll ever get up another memorial."

"Oh no, 'tain't that important."

"Yes it is, Victor. Why, you don't know but what they're counting on your returns to finish up this memorial. We ain't ever been asked to do anything in this town before and I just couldn't stand it if the very first time, we was to fall down. I've told Ora and Emma and Mrs. Lupton and all, about your having been chosen. Besides, it's a great cause and we got to make a sacrifice. I guess Wilson would of, if it had been about someone like you feel about him. He wouldn't have stopped till he'd finished it up right."

"I might be able to pay it back, that is if I *did* decide to take it," he added hastily. "I could start carrying my lunches again. Of course Mr. Godfrey said they didn't expect no five hundred from me, still I don't like to feel I couldn't do the same as anyone else. I don't know whether you noticed, but this memorial thing's been kind of on my mind and I'd hate mighty bad to turn in just eighteen dollars. It wouldn't look as though I took the thing serious. Not that I give a damn how it looks," he said hurriedly. "The idea is, I sit

around talking about Wilson and hanging the flag out for him, but when it comes to an actual showdown, I don't do nothing for him. You know, Mary, I got half a notion to take your idea."

THE FOLLOWING Tuesday, Mr. Godfrey, in session with the Wilson Memorial Executive Committee, held out a letter to the assembled gentlemen. "Say, that wasn't a bad idea I had, manufacturing an extra district at the last minute for that Wilson nut to go after. Listen to this:

14 Elmwood Street
Bedford, Mass.
May 31

Mr. Charles Godfrey
Dear sir:

Encloseing herwith returns from my canvasing for Woodrow Wilson Memorial in districts as per instructions. Hopeing same will meet with all requirements.

Respectfully yrs.
Victor Clement

"A check for five hundred and a money order for eighteen dollars and a quarter. Why, that's more'n anyone's turned in. Course it ain't as though we actually needed it. The collectors we appointed'll more than cover it. But can you imagine just quietly counting out a district that sends in five hundred and eighteen dollars? Offhand, I'd of said he couldn't scrape up the eighteen."



"Listen to this: —"



The East Indies

by **TEN KLOOSTER**

THESE exotic woodcuts are the work of an artist who is as yet unknown in Europe and America. As his name suggests, Ten Klooster has some chill Dutch blood in his veins, but with it is mixed the warmer blood of his native Java. At the moment he happens to be living in Veere, Holland, where he is a close neighbor of Hendrik Willem van Loon. Van Loon says of him: "His Javanese ancestors were civilized people who had developed a high degree of art when his European ancestors were still wild barbarians who painted their faces yellow with mud and ate their chickens raw. Ten Klooster, I think, feels this. His work, to a certain extent, is a revenge for many of the cruel and stupid things his white half has done unto his handsome Javanese half."

The Spice Islands